



FARM TOURISM: AN IMPORTANT DIMENSION OF TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Agritourism means travel organized around farming, small-scale food production or animal husbandry. Visiting farm for the purpose of enjoyment and education are key parts of this often-rural experience. Farm tourism immerses visitors in the heritage of a particular culture. Like ecotourism, farm tourism focuses on travel that is low-impact and empowering to local communities. Farm tourism is a refreshing new addition to the tourism that generates added income to the farmers. Agriculture and tourism are two important aspects of the economy of India. This paper attempts to explain the importance of farm tourism.

KEYWORDS: Agriculture, Tourism, Plantation, Farming, Rural Tourism, Cultivation.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy and farm tourism is the latest concept in the tourism sector to revolutionize the tourism industry. This is one of the most important ways to experience rural India. India's growth is based on the existing rich natural and cultural resources. The travel and tourism industry are the very important sector for economic growth of the world economy. In 2022, the contribution of India's travel and tourism sector to India's economy was worth Rs.15.7 trillion. India received 6.19 million foreign tourist arrivals during 2022 as compared to 1.52 million during the same period of 2021. The tourism industry will continue to grow in India.

Tourism has a negative impact on our environment and natural resources. The farm tourism is one of the ways to overcome this. Along with promoting tourism, 'farm tourism' also helps to maintain the balance of the nature by giving importance to the natural resources and agriculture. One of the growing sectors in tourism, farm tourism can be considered to be a form of rural tourism. The other types of rural tourism are ecotourism, adventure, cultural and pilgrim tourism. Farm tourism is also known as agrotourism or agritourism. Any agriculture-based activity, which attracts tourists can be defined as farm tourism. According to the World Tourism Organization, farm-tourism involves "accommodation being offered at the farmhouse, providing meals, and organising and assisting the participation of tourists in various farming operations". The term 'agri-tourism' or 'farm tourism' was initially used in the US, but it originated from an Italian National Legal Framework passed in 1985.

Scope of Farm Tourism

Around 75% of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and almost 26 percent of India's GDP comes from farming sector. Farm tourism is increasingly seen as a viable development strategy to promote a more diverse and sustainable rural economy. In recent years, the potential of farm tourism to generate socioeconomic benefits for farmers and suppliers has been established in a range of international contexts. It keeps the agricultural interests of the farmers intact while providing them extra income through tourist visits to the farm. Integration of agriculture with tourism activities also helps farmers to market their produce the innovative nature of agri-tourism that can attract a new generation of farmers, offer new opportunities for youth development in rural areas and boost rural economy. Tourists get a chance to visit farms and learn farming methodologies. Usually, organic farming and related development methods are followed in farms integrated with tourism activities. There are no artificial gardens or artificial ponds in these farms and no chemicals are used. In many other countries, rural and farm tourism is becoming an important activity for promoting the vitality and sustainability of rural communities.

Farm tourism is very prevalent in some countries like Taiwan, Iran, Norway, Sweden. Although farm-based tourism has a long tradition, particularly within Europe. Farm diversification into tourism has, in recent years, become more widely seen as an effective means of addressing the socio-economic problems of rural areas in general and the agricultural sector in particular. In farm tourism, as in any other form of tourism or socio-economic activity, there are processes and characteristics rooted in social relations. Farm tourism is an activity that takes place in a rural context.

Farm Tourism Activities

Farm tourism activities are purely nature based on agriculture activities. Farm tourism usually involves- accommodation, farm visits, farm shop visits, guided walks, and farm activities.

Usually farm tourism involves:

- Accommodation
- Farm visit
- Farm shops
- Guided walks in farms
- Farm activities

Organic farming and other farm activities are carried out in the tourist centre. Eco-friendly farm stays are important attractions. Various local sightseeing tours can be arranged as part of farm tourism activities. Fruit picking, travel by tractor through the fields, explore local villages, visit a dairy farm, learn various farming techniques are other attractions in the farm tourism field. There are many possible activities including bird watching, animal herding, village and leopard safaris, cycling, photography, farm tours and so on. Tourists can also involve in the farming process to get an understand of how crops such as paddy, mangoes, and jackfruit are cultivated and grown. Other possible activities include bullock cart rides, trekking, bird-watching, star gazing and fishing activities are also carried out under the farm tourism activities. These farm tourist centers are also a best spot for shopping natural products. Some among them also provides organic seeds to explore.

Farm Tourism Kerala

Farm Tourism, an integral part of eco-tourism, has become a very successful tourism programme. An agriculture dominated state and highly tourism potential, Kerala has tremendous potential for developing Farm Tourism. About 3,50,000 lakh hectares of land under paddy cultivation can be converted into tourist attractions in order to transfer the benefits of tourism directly to the farmers. As a step towards this, Kerala government has launched Green Farms Kerala, an exclusive venture that aims at preparing the farms and plantations in the State to receive tourists. The project will revitalise the agriculture sector, opening up a new world of opportunity for farmers, while enhancing tourist arrivals to God's Own Country. From conducting farm tours to enabling tourists to be a part of the daily activities in the farm, from showcasing and selling farm produces to offering visitors a taste of the local cuisine, green farms in Kerala helps generate additional income from farms.

Agriculture is a way of life in Kerala from time immemorial. In districts like Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, Pathanamthitta, and Kottayam, the farming community occupies unique place in the society. Most foreigners come to Kerala to experience its unique flora and fauna. All these forms can be combined with farm tourism. Government is planning to market farm tourism in the state in a big way by linking various organic farms across the state. Under the project, farms are to be turned into farming training centres to preserve Kerala's traditional rice varieties.

Farm tourism in Kerala is being developed as a relatively new tourism product. Kerala, being an agricultural dominated state, has tremendous potential for developing Farm Tourism in a big way without much additional investment. Reports state that Kerala has 30.22 lakhs hectares of gross cropped area which is 56.78% of the State's total geographical area. More than one third of the cropped area contains plantations of tea, coffee, rubber, pepper, cardamom and ginger, and another one third of this area is covered by coconut plantations. The State has about 350,000 lakhs hectares of land under paddy cultivation. There is a possibility of converting potential cropped areas of the state as tourist attractions with minimum intervention to transfer the benefits of tourism directly to the

farmers.

The various schemes underway are intended to prepare the plantations of Kerala to receive tourists by presenting a positive image of the farm and of agriculture as a whole, in view of revitalising the agriculture sector of Kerala through tourism. The Government decision to allow 5% of the farm area for tourism purpose has been an encouraging factor for the tourism industry. Numerous projects are being planned by the state to prepare the plantations of Kerala to receive tourists by presenting a positive image of the farm and of agriculture as a whole, in view of revitalising the agriculture sector through tourism the use of indigenous methods and organic farming is widely accepted and is popular among tourists. Many destinations like Kanthalloor located near Munnar is an example in developing farm tourism. Nelliampathy, the beautiful hill destination of Palakkad is another important example where farm tourism had been successfully implemented.

An agricultural based society, Kerala has endless opportunity to develop farm tourism. Tourist who visits Kerala, always want to experience the greenery of Kerala. If they are given an opportunity to explore the nature, they will definitely utilize it. Much additional investment is also not needed for promoting 'farm tourism'. Now the state tourism department recently has launched 'Green Farms Kerala', which aims to revamp agricultural land in the state to tourism destinations. Along with promoting tourism, this scheme will help the locals especially the farmers too to have financial stability.

Benefits of Farm Tourism

Farm tourism helps the tourists to be part of day-to-day agricultural activities. They can also buy products from there along with enjoying the local cuisines. The additional income from this can be utilized for the improvement of agriculture and tourism. The following points highlights the major benefits of farm tourism:

- expanding farm operations;
- using farm-based products in new and innovative ways;
- improving farm revenue streams;
- increasing awareness of local agricultural products;
- increasing the importance of maintaining agricultural land;
- channelling additional farm revenues directly to family members;
- improving farm living conditions, working areas & farm recreation opportunities;
- developing managerial skill and entrepreneurial spirit;
- increasing the long-term sustainability for farm businesses;
- increasing protection of rural landscapes and natural environments;
- helping to preserve and revitalize local traditions, art and craft;
- increasing awareness of agricultural issues and values;
- promoting the on-going use of local agricultural products and services;
- helping to diversify & strengthen rural economy;
- diversifying the mix of tourism products and services available to visitors;
- increasing tourism flows into attractive rural regions.

CONCLUSION

Agri tourism is where agriculture and tourism meet to provide us with an amazing educational experience, whether it is a tour of a farm or ranch, a festival. Farm tourism is becoming an increasingly popular industry globally and even in almost every state in India. Farm tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry, which normally occurs on farms. Implementation of farm tourism with a futuristic view keeping in mind its impact on the economy and society will pave way for better tomorrow. It gives you the opportunity to experience the real enchanting and authentic contact with the rural life, taste the local genuine food and get familiar with the various farming tasks during the visit. Agriculture and tourism together present unique opportunities for farmers to diversify and expand their operations. For attaining sustainable development, we can incorporate both agriculture and tourism.

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